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ABSTRACT

A ninth grade home economics course, taught in an Australian high school, was evaluated with the goals of providing staff with information on evaluation procedures and obtaining information upon which judgments and recommendations for change about a particular course could be made. Of key importance in this project was the presence of an outside Research Officer with evaluation expertise, who was invited by the staff to assist in the evaluation. This "outsider" acted as advisor, coordinator, contact between the school and external resources, collector of information, and "critical friend" to the teachers whose courses were being evaluated. This report represents the Research Officer's synthesis of perceptions of the project, and attempts to identify the characteristics of the role as "outsider" that were seen by participants as meeting their needs. Suggestions are made for improving the evaluation process in schools, and for developing the role of the outside assistant. An outline is given of the teacher questionnaires used in the project and the interview and observation schedules. (JD)

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giving an account

PART III

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TEACHERS AS EVALUATORS PROJECT

SP 410

TEACHERS AS EVALUATORS PROJECT

G I V I N G A N A C C O U N T

Description and Review of a School-level Evaluation Project Undertaken with the Help of an 'Outside' Facilitator.

Heather Felton
Diana McConachy

December, 1980.

FOREWORD

Growing numbers of schools are being encouraged to evaluate their educational practices, and for many teachers this represents an unfamiliar activity, requiring particular skills.

It is becoming increasingly evident that many teachers wish to have assistance to develop these skills. This assistance can be provided in a variety of ways, for example, inservice courses, written guidelines, or the use of an 'outside' resource person. There is no strong evidence to suggest that one approach is more successful than another, and there is a clear need to investigate the benefits and limitations of a number of approaches.

In 1979 some teachers at a secondary school in Hobart evaluated their Grade 9 Home Economics option course. External assistance was provided by a Curriculum Officer from the Curriculum Centre, Education Department of Tasmania.

In early 1980, the Research Officer from the Teachers as Evaluators Project was invited to review the evaluation project, with a particular focus on the role of the Curriculum Officer as an 'outsider'.

The following papers outline the evaluation process followed by the school, and the review of the role of the outsider in this process. It is envisaged that although context-specific, they will be of interest to teachers and other people working in the area of school-level curriculum evaluation.

Phillip Hughes
Project Director

PART I

Merrymay High School Evaluation Project:

Some Reflections on the Organization of the Project and the Processes Used in Gathering Information.

Heather Felton
Senior Education Officer
Curriculum Centre
Education Department of
Tasmania

PART II

A Review of a School-Level Evaluation Project, with a Particular Emphasis on the Role of the Outsider.

Diana McConachy
Research Officer
Teachers as Evaluators Project.

PART I

MERRYMAY HIGH SCHOOL
EVALUATION PROJECT

Some Reflections on the Organization of the Project and the Processes Used in Gathering Information

Heather Felton
Senior Education Officer
Curriculum Centre
Education Department of Tasmania.

PREAMBLE

In this report the term evaluation is used to mean a process by which information is obtained for the purpose of forming judgements which are to be used in decision making.

This evaluation was undertaken by school in the belief that:

> educational practices are unlikely to achieve perfection, therefore there is always some improvement that can be made that will be of benefit to student learning.
>
> the curriculum has complete meaning only in the actions and relationships between teachers and students as they work together in the activities of particular courses or programs.

The Setting

Merrymay High School is a comprehensive, co-educational secondary school situated in a suburb of Hobart. (High schools in Tasmania are four year institutions which run from year seven to year ten. Year ten is the end of compulsory education for most pupils. Higher School Certificate courses, years eleven and twelve, are conducted in separate institutions.)

Merrymay High has 540 pupils and a teaching staff of 51, two of whom are part-time employees. The school has been in existence since 1964 and, by Schools Commission criteria, is classified as disadvantaged.

At the time that this evaluation project was undertaken, the curriculum for grades 9 and 10 included what the school called options (non-compulsory subjects taken for two years) and electives (courses less than one year in duration, usually taken for one term).

The Curriculum Centre is a service branch of the Education Department. A role of some curriculum officers is to be available, on request, to work with schools undertaking curriculum review and development.

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THE BEGINNINGS

Early in Term 2, 1979, the senior staff of Merrymay High School decided to undertake an evaluation of the grade nine Home Economics course and requested assistance from the Curriculum Centre. Originally the intention had been to evaluate all grade 9 and grade 10 option courses but on consideration the staff decided to reduce the scale of the project by narrowing the focus.

The project had three general purposes:

- trialling evaluation procedures for wider application at a later date;
- obtaining information upon which judgements could be made about a particular course;
- obtaining a description of a particular course for the information of the school staff.

A school committee was established to manage the project. A curriculum officer was invited to undertake the tasks of advising the committee on procedures which would be appropriate, co-ordinating the work involved, and providing a link with people and other resources from outside the school.

Due to scepticism regarding the value of projects which take many months to complete, the committee requested that whatever was undertaken should provide information in a relatively short time. This request was an important one in determining the kind of information that was sought, the procedures that were used and the period of time allocated to the collection of information.

The school staff's experience of evaluation procedures was also taken into account in planning. As far as was appropriate, methods that had not been used at the school were included.

THE PROJECT

The Task:

to evaluate the grade nine Home Economics course

Purposes:

to provide the staff of the school with information about procedures suitable for evaluating option subjects at this school

to provide the staff of the school with information about a selected option course

to provide information for use by the Home Economics teachers in making judgements about the course

Specific Objectives:

to describe the planned course and components of the implemented course

to obtain opinions about the implemented course

to analyse the descriptions and the opinions so that judgements could be made

to make recommendations for action, based on the judgements

The Steps Involved:

Step 1: Identifying and Making Clear an Issue

This step was undertaken by the senior staff of the school during Term I, 1979, and was almost completed by the time the co-ordinator joined the project. Although some refinement of the purposes of the project took place as a result of the initial meetings between the school evaluation committee and the co-ordinator, the focus issue remained as delineated by the staff:

What is the option course and is it perceived as appropriate?

Step 2: Planning and Structuring

During the week prior to the commencement of the project the co-ordinator met informally with members of the committee, particularly the Home Economics staff and spent time getting to know the school and its staff and becoming familiar with the grade 9 course. From this discussion and observation a tentative plan for the conduct of the Project was prepared for formal discussion by the committee. With some modifications this plan was accepted and used as a basis for the conduct of the Project. Through discussion, the committee's understanding of the focus issue was explored. Agreement was reached on those points not defined by the

senior staff, such as whose perception was to be taken into account to decide appropriateness.

The plan included an outline of the purposes and objectives of the project, the proposed procedures and timetable, the audiences for reports and a statement of the roles and responsibilities of individuals and groups involved. Discussions on these items enabled the committee to assess the extent of resource commitment required for the successful completion of the project. It was at this stage that the committee invited the co-ordinator to also take on the role of collector of information as there seemed no way in which the school could release a teacher for the time required.

This plan, once accepted by the committee became a form of contract between the co-ordinator and the school. It stated clearly what kind of reports the co-ordinator would provide, who had control over information and who would be making judgements and decisions using the information. This is an essential aspect of any project of this kind as unless these decisions are documented, at a later date, misunderstandings can occur.

The plan was viewed as a statement of intention which was open to modification as the Project progressed.

Important principles that were established at this stage were:

- Ownership of the information collected: The Home Economics teachers were to have control over the information that was collected. Any judgements or recommendations made concerning the course were to be done by the Home Economics teachers, who would write the report of the evaluation for distribution and discussion by staff of Merrymay High School.

- The Audience for particular reports arising from the Project: The Home Economics teachers received a report from the "outsider". They used this report as the basis for their report to the evaluation committee. The evaluation committee then decided who would comprise the wider audience.

- The rights and obligations of the outside co-ordinator: The Co-ordinator was to write a report of the evaluation for the staff of the Home Economics Department. She was also to provide a report on the procedures used in the evaluation, their usefulness in this project and their appropriateness for use in evaluating other option subjects for the school staff. While it may have been necessary for the Co-ordinator to involve people from outside the school, it was understood that she would obtain the approval of the Evaluation Committee before inviting officers from service branches or members of the community to assist in this evaluation.

- A commitment by the school to giving teaching release time for the Home Economics staff, as required.

The plan of the project included Stages 2 and 3.

This enabled a range of sources of information appropriate to the focus to be identified, even though the time limit placed on the project restricted the sources that could be used. (The school staff had the option of seeking further information at a later date if this seemed useful.)

Step 3: Collecting Information

Information about the course was obtained from the teachers and students involved in the course and by observation of lessons. This step took five weeks to complete (July 24 - August 27).

The co-ordinator, with the permission of the school, involved three other people in collecting information; these people were all outsiders to the school and were invited to carry out specific tasks (assisting with student interviews, observing lessons).

To focus the collection of information three questions were posed:

What is planned? (e.g. design of the course, resources available)

What happens? (e.g. observations and perceptions)

What should happen? (e.g. opinions on the ideal)

The procedures used to obtain information were: classroom observation, focused interviews, diaries, questionnaires, analysis of existing documents.

Step 4: Analysing the Information

Analysis was carried out in three stages:

1. During the two weeks of the school holidays the co-ordinator categorised the information and from this wrote a detailed interim report for the Home Economics teachers.
2. During two afternoons, the teachers discussed the report with the co-ordinator and then were given three to four weeks to consider, discuss and analyse the information.
3. Following this reflection period, teachers met with the co-ordinator to discuss their reactions and make decisions on the content of the final report.

Step 5: Making Judgements

This step took place concurrently with stage 3 of the analysis of information.

The co-ordinator met with the Home Economics staff on three occasions - one afternoon of each of three successive weeks. The implications of the findings of the investigation were discussed. The perceptions of teachers and pupils were considered in relation to the intentions of the course and some judgements made regarding the effectiveness of the course. These were written as the conclusions to the report.

Decisions were made regarding the content and format of the final report.

Step 6: Deciding the Action

There are three elements in this step (only the first part has been concluded at the stage of writing this report).

1. the teachers of the course, taking into account the conclusions about the effectiveness of the course, prepared recommendations
2. the recommendations have to be considered by the school's evaluation committee and others responsible for decision making in the school
3. the implications of the recommendations have to be considered by the decision makers together with the teachers of the course, and strategies developed to bring about the desired changes.

Step 7: Making the Desired Changes

This is probably the hardest part of all.

Success is dependent upon a number of factors. Ones that are often overlooked but are of fundamental importance are:

1. the extent to which the school staff genuinely want to improve the quality of learning in the school;
2. the degree to which those involved in the evaluation have been honest with themselves, and one another;
3. the extent to which open and genuine reflection on the issues involved takes place between the staff of the school over an appropriate period of time.

Once action has been taken the cycle of review, reflection and action should continue, becoming an integral part of the operational style within the school.

A REVIEW OF THE METHODS USED TO COLLECT INFORMATION

1. *A written summary of the planned course*

Who was involved?	The four teachers of the course.
When?	Week 1
Why used?	• provided information for the final report • it was done at this stage to enable the co-ordinator to become familiar with the teacher's intentions before observing classes
How was it done?	• requirements were outlined to teachers and discussed to make sure all aspects were covered • most information was available from existing documents • teachers were given about one week to prepare the summary • most work was done in their own time
Some comments:	

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2. *Analysis of a sample of student's work*

Who was involved?	Co-ordinator, randomly selected students.
When?	Weeks 2, 3 and 4.
Why used?	• supplemented information about the content of the course provided by teachers • provided information about the implemented course
How was it done?	• co-ordinator borrowed work books from a sample of students • practical work was examined during class time • pupils were asked by the teacher to bring completed craft and sewing to show co-ordinator
Some comments:	• time did not permit any intensive analysis of student work (practical and written) • work was discussed with the pupil responsible • pupil's workbooks provide additional information about the implemented course

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3. *Diaries*

Who was involved?	The four teachers of the course.
When?	Week 2
Why used?	• to provide information about teacher and pupil classroom activities to supplement the observations of outsiders • to document the demand made on teacher's time outside classroom teaching during a sample week • to record the teacher's interactions with grade 9 students and other teachers outside of classroom teaching
How was it done?	• the purpose of keeping the diary was discussed with the teachers and a written outline of what was required given to each teacher • teachers had to write up their observations in their own time • the sample week chosen was one where no observations were being undertaken by outsiders
Some comments:	• teachers found this process time consuming, particularly as it was difficult to record information about class interaction during or immediately following the lesson • the information obtained from diaries was not as useful as anticipated • it may be that keeping diaries at a later stage in the evaluation may result in more useful information, or that using this method for a different purpose may justify the time involved • pupils can also be asked to keep diaries recording their activities and/or perceptions

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4. *Observation of lessons*

Who was involved?	Co-ordinator
When?	Weeks 3 and 4
Why used?	• enabled co-ordinator to gain clearer understanding of the course and of teachers' intentions • provided a major source of information about the implemented course
How was it done?	• a check list of aspects to be noted prepared beforehand

- the lessons to be observed were identified in advance
- a detailed record of what happened and what was said was made by the observer during the lesson
- where actions or intentions were not clear to the observer, these were discussed with the teacher or pupil at appropriate moments during the lesson or immediately following
- general observations were written up from the notes after the lesson

Some comments:

- this method worked well for its purpose in this evaluation

Some general drawbacks are:

- the presence of an observer in the classroom can affect the behaviour of both teachers and pupils, so that what is observed is atypical. This effect can be reduced by observing a number of lessons and by the observer being present in the classroom for other purposes.
- the observer's bias may influence what is seen as being relevant
- developing a framework or guidelines for recording observations is difficult. If too closely specified this may predetermine what is recorded and prevent the identification of the most relevant elements within the interactions.

Other ways of recording classroom interactions:

Videotapes, audiotapes of the lessons; pupils and teachers keeping diaries recording their perceptions; audiotape of groups of pupils discussing their perceptions of the lesson.

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5. *Questionnaire*

Who was involved? The four teachers of the course

When? Week 2

Why used?

- provided base data relating to the teachers' educational philosophy, expectations and attitudes
- was used in framing questions for the group interview
- provided information on the teacher's view of 'the ideal' for inclusion in the report to the Home Economics teachers

How was it done?	• ten questions were asked, each to be answered in writing
	• the work was done in teacher's own time
	• teachers were given just over a week to complete the questions
Some comments:	• an effective method for obtaining information of this kind from teachers
	• a questionnaire could have been prepared to gather information from all grade 8, 9 and 10 pupils. Developing effective questionnaires for mass administration is time consuming. Given the time constraint on the information gathering stage the method was rejected, though the possibility of committee members undertaking this task at a later date was considered.

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6. Interviews with teachers

A.	Who was involved?	Co-ordinator interviewed the four Home Economics teachers together.
	When?	Week 3, total time 2¼ hours (1½ hours one afternoon; 3/4 hour the following morning)
	Why used?	• supplemented the written information (provided by the teacher) about the planned course
		• enabled opinions on aspects of the course to be obtained efficiently
		• gave teachers an opportunity to discuss the course in some detail and to identify the group's perception of the ideal
	How was it done?	• following discussions with the teachers of the course the co-ordinator prepared a list of topics which were used as starting points for the interview
		• the discussion was tape recorded and later transcribed

B.	Who was involved?	Co-ordinator interviewed each teacher individually
	When?	Weeks 3 and 4 (approximately one hour for each teacher)
	Why used?	• as a follow up to the observation of lessons
		• enabled the co-ordinator to seek detailed information about each course, and to discuss aspects arising from observation
	How was it done?	• a time was arranged to suit each teacher
		• notes were made during the discussion
	Some comments:	• both types of interviews were effective

group interviews also gave the teachers the opportunity to reflect upon the course, its purposes and intentions, something that is of value in itself

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7. *Interviews with pupils*

Who was involved?	A sample of grade 9 Home Economics students; co-ordinator and project advisor.
When?	Week 5 (one day).
Why used?	• to obtain student views on the course • group interviews were preferred as this reduces the extent to which an individual feels threatened • the presence of two adults enabled a relaxed discussion situation to be established quickly • the accurate recording of the discussion was assisted by having two adults present
How was it done?	• a list of discussion topics was used to provide some structure for the interviews; the topics were developed from lists of questions provided by the school evaluation committee and by the teachers of the course • teachers provided a list of all pupils' names in order of priority for interviewing (the co-ordinator had requested that certain pupils be interviewed together and that some 'good' and some 'problem' pupils' names appear early in the list) • a timetable for the groups was prepared so that pupils knew when their interview would take place • pupils were interviewed in groups of five, with two adults present - one mainly responsible for interviewing, one for recording • each interview took 30 minutes
Some comments:	• this seemed to be a very effective method of obtaining views from a large number of pupils, in a short time • specifying topics allowed information to be gathered on aspects thought important by teachers but also made it possible for pupils to bring up aspects that they thought important • the discussion that occurs between pupils is often more revealing of their attitudes and perceptions than their direct answers to questions

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8. *Observation of lessons*

Who was involved?	Neutral 'outsiders' - two people with teaching experience but no previous involvement with the school.
When?	Week 5
Why used?	• enabled a greater number of lessons to be observed and so supplemented the information obtained by the co-ordinator • reduced the influence of observer bias on the information collected
How was it done?	• the co-ordinator arranged for the observers to be employed • observers were briefed regarding the type of information to be obtained, but were not told anything about the course • observers kept a detailed record of their perceptions of classroom interactions • the observer reported directly to the co-ordinator • the co-ordinator identified the generalisable perceptions
Some comments:	• from the co-ordinator's point of view, having other peoples' perceptions was very helpful • the timing of the use of this method was inappropriate (it coincided with interviews of pupils; only half the planned observations occurred because of a clash with Sports Day) • the 'neutral' outsiders could have reported directly to the teachers involved. Both teachers and outsiders rejected this on the grounds that the perceptions should be incorporated with those obtained by other methods

A REVIEW OF SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS ...

Although the final stages of this Project are yet to be completed, some comments can be made about the timing, the general organisation and the role of the co-ordinator. These may be of assistance in any discussions concerning methods of evaluating other option subjects.

This project was designed to obtain information about a course in such a way that disruptions to the teaching and learning programs were confined to a few weeks of the year. It was based on case study methods and aimed to describe the differences in 'meaning' that might exist among the participants in relation to the purposes and activites of the course. This was done largely by observing classroom interactions, and obtaining participants' perceptions of these interactions.

The Project was successful in that:

1. the methods used did provide sufficient information for some differences and similarities in meaning to be identified.
2. the timetable developed for the Project was realistic.
3. the teachers of the course were given adequate time for reflection on the outcomes.
4. directions for change and development were apparent.

Whilst these successes can be identified it does not mean that the project design was ideal for the purposes specified, that every element within it was appropriate or effective or that other methods of investigation would be any less successful.

... ABOUT TIMING

Secondary schools are busy, complex organisations involving many people all of whom are committed months in advance to a tight schedule of activities. The relatively inflexible administrative structure necessary for the successful operation of the school places constraints upon any additional activities (like an evaluation project) that require a commitment of time from teachers and interrupt the ongoing program.

In designing an evaluation project these realities should be taken into consideration. Whatever time of the year is chosen there will be pressure on teachers' time, planned interruptions to the classroom program will occur and unexpected events, such as illness, will delay the smooth progress of any evaluation plan.

... ABOUT FOCUSING

Deciding the issue to be investigated (the focusing of an evaluation) is frequently approached as if it is the least difficult and least time consuming aspect of the process. If this attitude is taken, usually only a few people are involved in the decision. A consequence of this

is that there is no guarantee that the decision makers' conviction regarding the importance of the issue will be shared by all teachers involved.

It has become clear that the success of an evaluation is largely determined by the way in which the issue has been identified. Those projects that are perceived as successful and do lead to genuine improvements allow considerable time for this focusing and make sure all people who will take part in the evaluation are involved: making the decision is done in a way that allows a genuine need to emerge and also enables the teachers involved to make a commitment to change. For this reason, attaining a commitment, it is particularly important that the issue to be investigated is identified as a pressing problem or need by those who may be required to change their behaviour.

Inviting the outsider, or contact person, to participate in the project before the issue is selected is also an important principle that has emerged. This early involvement maximises the contribution that the 'outsider' can make to the effectiveness of the project, gives them the opportunity to make the necessary commitment to the aims of the project and enables the essential relationship of trust to be established between the teachers and the outsider.

... *ABOUT COLLECTING INFORMATION*

The period of time allocated to the collection of information for this evaluation was the last five weeks of term two. While it was possible to collect adequate information during this time, the restriction did create some problems.

1. A number of procedures had to occur simultaneously. For many procedures this does not matter, but when observation of lessons and interviews with children occurred on the same day the observations were adversely affected.

2. Interruptions to the normal classroom timetable often occur and this means that it will always take longer than expected to observe a given number of lessons. The five week period did not allow enough time for all types of lessons with each teacher to be observed.

3. Theoretically it was possible in a two day period to interview all children taking the course. Because the interviews were planned for the last week of the term, they clashed with a school sports day and a major field trip organised by another department in the school. Only half the children could be interviewed on the one day on which both the children and the interviewers were available.

4. The intensity of the work involved in collecting the information during the five weeks did not allow enough time for discussion about interim findings to occur between members of the evaluation team. It would be desirable for such reflection to become an integral part of the whole evaluation process, instead of being confined to a separate phase.

While it appears that a five week period is an adequate amount of time in which to collect information, it would probably be more realistic to plan for this phase to occur over a period of about two months. If an evaluation project, of this kind, were planned to start near the beginning of term 2, this would enable the activities of the project to take place without too much modification or curtailment.

... ABOUT ANALYSING, INTERPRETING AND MAKING JUDGEMENTS

The time required for these stages will vary considerably depending on the focus of the evaluation, the method of presenting information, the purposes of the evaluation and the number of people involved. (Due to the absence of the co-ordinator on one month's leave, for this Project these stages were planned to take approximately two months; one month would have been sufficient if the co-ordinator had not been absent.) It is important that discussion and reflection are recognised as integral to these stages and that the time required for this to happen in a relaxed and open manner, is made available to the teachers involved.

... ABOUT THE OUTSIDER'S ROLE

'Evaluation' is not an end in itself. It is one important stage in a cyclical process of review, reflection, decision making, action, reflection review .... An evaluation that does not lead to some kind of development is not worth undertaking.

In making evaluation an integral part of the operation of the school, ways have to eventually be adopted that free teachers from complete dependence on an 'outsider'. Using an evaluation project as a means of enabling teachers to reflect on the process is one important way that this can be done. Another is to encourage teachers to become 'self conscious' classroom observers, using such aids as the audio tape recorder and involving other teachers and pupils in sharing perceptions.

It is probably always advantageous to have a trusted 'outsider' assisting with aspects of an evaluation. As the teachers involved in this evaluation said, "It helped to keep us honest."

The 'outsider' involved in an evaluation project can be invited by the school to take on any of a number of roles. The decision to use the outsider for this project as advisor, co-ordinator of the tasks, contact between school and external resources, collector of information and the reactor, or 'critical friend', during the stages of analysis and judgement making, did place a lot of responsibility on one person. For the purpose of this project this decision seemed appropriate.

Teachers taking part in any future evaluation project should consider the possibility of allocating some of these functions to other people, particularly to other teachers or to members of the general community. (For this Project the availability of a second outsider to take on the specific role of 'advisor' was a great help.)

Establishing a committee to manage the project is essential; this committee should have direct links with the school's decision making structure and should include those directly affected by an evaluation. It is very difficult for an 'outsider' to work effectively for the school without the advice and support of a committee.

It is important that the 'outsider' invited to take on a task, such as this project, is acceptable to the school. This may mean that no commitment to the project should be made, either by the school or by the school or by the co-ordinator, until both have had an opportunity to 'assess' one another. This could take place during the focusing stage. An agreement can then be worked out if there is mutual satisfaction. Establishing a clear understanding of purpose and roles is most important before commencing any project of this kind.

APPENDIX A

PROPOSED TIMETABLE

Date to start	Teachers	Date to complete	Co-ordinator	Date to complete
July 24	Summarise information from documents	31	Prepare procedural plan in consultation with teachers	31
			Prepare teacher questionnaire	
August 1	Answer questionnaire	9	Prepare observation schedule	10
6	Keep diaries	10	Prepare teacher interview schedule	10
9			Observe classes	22
14	Interviews (1.30 - 3.00 p.m.)	14	Interview teachers	14
15	Interviews (8.45 - 9.30 a.m.)	15	Interview teachers	15
			Prepare student interview schedule	24
27			Interview students (during mornings only)	31
September 3			Prepare draft report	17
17	Read and discuss draft report	21	Discuss report with Home Economics Staff	21
21	Prepare report for school	?		
			Prepare report on procedures, for school	?

APPENDIX B

1 *TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRES*

1.1 *Some Preliminary Questions for the Teachers of the Course*

Please answer each of these questions on a separate sheet. Include any information you think is appropriate to the question.

1. What special value do you think Home Economics has in the education of children?

2. What are you attempting to do in your grade 9 course?

3. How well do you think you are achieving what you are attempting to do?

4. What (if anything) makes it difficult for you to achieve your purposes as well as you would like?

5. What sort of things work well for you with this class?

6. Are there some things that don't work well for you with the class? (If so give details.)

7. What do you think are the needs of the students taking the grade 9 course?

8. Do you think students should participate in the planning of courses? (Give reasons or details if you can.)

9. What would you say were the most common reasons for students in this year's grade 9 choosing to do the Home Economics Course?

10. Imagine ....

    Tomorrow you are going to the College of Advanced Education to do an intensive two week course in advanced cookery or advanced sewing techniques. There will be twenty students and one teacher.

    What content and teaching procedures should be included in this course for you to consider it to be an excellent one?

1.2 *Information About Grade 9 Students*

Please provide the following information about the grade 9 students that you teach.

1. Subject taken (if you know the reason for the child taking the subject, please include it).

2. Name of child.

3. Your assessment of ability level and/or aptitude for the subject.

4. Your opinion of the child's attitude to you and/or the subject; include any comments about general behaviour if relevant.

5. Your opinion of the child.

6. Anything known about the child's home background, behaviour generally, personal expectations, relationships with other pupils, etc.

7. Any other comments you'd like to make.

2 *INTERVIEW SCHEDULES*

2.1 *Topic Guide for Student Interviews*

Name
Grade
Option

Attitude to school
Career expectations
Previous Home Economics experience
Choice of option:

how made; parental involvement;
first choice?; relevance to career, etc.

Opinion of option:

what liked; what disliked; parental opinion; own performance; costs involved; problems, etc.

Changes that would make and why?

to content
to organisation
to teaching or learning procedures

2.2 *Topic Guide for Teacher Interviews*

1. The Givens:

e.g. architecture, facilities, equipment, finance, timetable, students.

2. The Intentions:

planning procedures
content - goals, objectives, relevance, etc.
processes - what, why; what not planned for and why.
evaluation - how, what, when, what classroom evidence.

3. What happens?

what part of the 'ideal' works as planned
what doesn't seem to work and why

4. What would you do in this course if there were no constraints? (such as timetable, money, etc.)

5. The grade 9 students

   differences from other groups
   e.g. in prior experiences; in attitudes,
   in ability
   particular difficulties or strengths.

6. The Externals:

   influences on the course? e.g. parental expectations, school requirements, Schools Board, etc.
   involvement with other teachers or other areas of the school, etc.
   involvement with parents, community, etc.

3 *OBSERVATION "SCHEDULE"*

3.1 *Classroom Observation* - aspects to be noted

1. Physical environment - e.g. position of furniture; displays; atmosphere; cleanliness; resources available.

2. Commencement of lesson - e.g. number of children, entrance of children, children's attitude; selection of seating positions; teacher's actions, instructions and preparation.

3. Teacher's Organisation of lesson - e.g. content, method of presentation; tasks set; time spent on different aspects; expectations.

4. Teacher's classroom management procedures.

5. Interruptions - what kind; what effect; how managed.

6. Relationships - student to student; student to teacher; teacher to student.

7. Lesson conclusion.

PART II

A REVIEW OF A SCHOOL LEVEL EVALUATION PROJECT, WITH A PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE ROLE OF THE OUTSIDER

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INTRODUCTION

In Terms 2 and 3, 1979, some teachers at Merrymay High School, Hobart, conducted an evaluation of the Grade 9 Home Economics option. External assistance was provided by a Curriculum Officer from the Curriculum Centre, Education Department of Tasmania.

The evaluation was completed in December 1979, and in early 1980, the Research Officer of the Teachers as Evaluators Project was invited to review the process, with a particular focus on the role of the Curriculum Officer, as an 'outsider'. The Research Officer was selected because it was considered that she could independently gather participants' perceptions of events, having had no previous contact with the school or the Tasmanian Department of Education.

The following report represents the Research Officer's synthesis of these perceptions and her attempts to identify the characteristics of the 'outsider' that were perceived by participants as meeting their needs.

It is hoped that some findings may be of value in other evaluation contexts. Thus, the report is written with three audiences in mind:

1. The teachers and the school - who undertook the evaluation and may be contemplating using a similar approach in other departments.

2. The Curriculum Centre - which provides 'outsiders' and needs to be aware of the benefits and limitations of the approach and the key features of the role.

3. The Teachers as Evaluators Project - which as a national education project can facilitate the dissemination of much-needed information about the possible role(s) of outsiders in school-level evaluation.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

To avoid confusion, the following terms are used in the report:

THE PROJECT: a pilot evaluation of a Grade 9 Home Economics option course undertaken by the Home Economics staff at Warrane High School, with outside assistance provided by a Curriculum Officer from the Curriculum Centre.

PARTICIPANTS: all those who were involved in the Project; for example, Home Economic staff, evaluation committee, Vice-Principal, outsider, other personnel from Curriculum Centre and Research Branch.

OUTSIDER: also referred to as the 'Project Co-ordinator', a Curriculum Officer with particular evaluation expertise who was invited by the staff to assist them to carry out the evaluation.

EVALUATION: a process by which information is obtained for the purpose of forming judgements which are to be used in decision-making.

SCHOOL-LEVEL EVALUATION: an evaluation initiated and undertaken by teachers in a school. It need not involve all staff and can use the services of an outsider, however, ownership of information rests with the school.

HOME ECONOMICS: a course which aims to give students basic skills in meal preparation, nutrition, home management, laundry and elementary sewing techniques. The Grade 9 Home Economics option in 1979 offered Home Arts & Crafts A (Needlework) and Home Arts & Crafts B (Cookery & Nutrition).

OPTION COURSE: a year-long non-compulsory subject.

THE REVIEW: a retrospective 'critique' of the school-level evaluation project undertaken at Merrymay High School; it attempts to identify the salient features of the role of the outsider in the project.

REVIEWER: the Research Officer of the Teachers as Evaluators Project.

THE REPORT: the document written by the Research Officer of the Teachers as Evaluators Project.

THE SCHOOL-LEVEL EVALUATION PROJECT: a Schools Commission funded project which provides assistance for schools wishing to carry out school-level evaluations in Tasmania.

METHOD

The information upon which this report is based was collected by the Research Officer over a one-week period in April, 1980. It was obtained from an analysis of documents and interviews.

Documents analysed included the Project Co-ordinator's diary and the three evaluation reports:

1. *Merrymay High School Evaluation Project: Summary of the Project's purposes, objectives and requirements, the proposed procedures and timetable.*

2. *Merrymay High School Evaluation Project: Some Reflections on the Organisation of the Project.*

3. *A Review of an Option Course at Merrymay - Home Economics Course for Grade 9: intentions and perceptions.*

Interviews were conducted on an individual basis with the four Home Economics teachers, the Vice-Principal, three teachers not involved with the evaluation, the project co-ordinator and personnel from the Curriculum Centre and Research Branch who advised the co-ordinator. Group interviews were conducted with the evaluation committee (excluding the Vice-Principal and Home Economics staff) and five representatives from each of the Grade 9 and Grade 10 Home Economics option classes. The analysis and synthesis of this information is subjective in that the information gathered was based on perceptions and opinions.

The following review is an attempt to relate the complex elements of the outsider's role in the project to the intentions of those involved. The identification of those areas where expectations and intentions differ is an important step if evaluation is to continue to be seen as a worthwhile, ongoing activity.

It must be noted that the reviewer collected perceptions over an extremely short period of time, and her presence may have affected participants' perceptions of events that had occurred some six months earlier.

THE BEGINNINGS

Prior to the school-level evaluation project, staff at Merrymay High School had had limited evaluation experience, tending to concentrate on student assessment, and in some cases equating evaluation with inspection.

For some years the school had been the recipient of Schools Commission funds (a variety of programs was funded by the Disadvantaged Schools Program), which involved some form of evaluation for the purpose of justification of expenditure. This, however, tended to be done in an informal, subjective manner and relied heavily on the person responsible for the program.

At the end of 1978, Senior Masters/Mistresses looked at their programs in some depth. Although intensive, these evaluations were done in a subjective way, as were most others carried out by individual teachers in the school.

In the wider context, a number of teachers felt that the TEND Report, the Report on Secondary Education in Tasmania, and the move towards school-based curriculum development would eventually force teachers to be conversant with curriculum evaluation procedures, deemed to be a necessary and important part of the professional responsibility of teachers.

Thus, in Term 2, 1979 two specific attempts were made to involve staff at Merrymay High School in school-level evaluation activities:

1. The Executive Officer from the School-Based Evaluation Project was invited to run an inservice workshop on evaluation. The school was granted a 'pupil-free' day so that the whole staff could gain some knowledge of evaluation procedures.

2. A decision was made by senior staff to undertake an evaluation of the Grade 9 Home Economics course. Originally the intention had been to evaluate all Grade 9 and Grade 10 option courses, but on consideration the staff decided to reduce the scale of the project by narrowing it to Grade 9 Home Economics. A school evaluation committee comprising senior staff and the Home Economics teachers was established to manage this project. A Curriculum Officer from the Curriculum Centre was invited to undertake the tasks of advising the committee on procedures which would be appropriate, co-ordinating the work involved and providing a link with people and other resources from outside the school.

The Executive Officer from the School-Based Evaluation Project and the Curriculum Officer from the Curriculum Centre commenced work at Merrymay on the same day. To avoid possible confusion, each worked as an assistant for the other .

What people said ..... about the beginnings

As previous evaluation activities in the school were variously described as 'ad hoc', 'subjective' and 'informal', and had been conducted with maximum effort and minimal outside assistance, senior staff were keen to involve 'outsiders' with the necessary experience and expertise so that more formal evaluation procedures could be introduced and carried out in the school.

However, the one-day evaluation workshop involving the whole school left many teachers confused and dubious about the value of the evaluation process. While most acknowledged the value of the discussions it generated, a number were unclear about its purpose

and felt it was only a simulated activity; therefore, not the real thing and 'a bit of a waste of time'.

The Home Economics Project was intended to be a 'pilot' evaluation, involving a small number of staff. Senior staff narrowed the focus due to this inservice component, and because a number of teachers, including the Home Economics Senior Mistress, considered that there was a timetabling problem in Grade 9 Home Economics which could be usefully investigated. However, the three other Home Economics teachers were not consulted before focussing occurred.

Senior staff were aware that a narrow focus could result in the evaluation being perceived as a threatening activity, but were confident that the staff would realise this was not the case. They proved to be correct; in conversation, the Home Economics staff revealed that they had felt no threat.

The Home Economics staff had previously associated evaluation with the assessment of students or inspection and were unaware of the procedures involved in school-level curriculum evaluation. Thus, they were keen to have an outsider working with them and although unsure of the exact nature of her role, they expected to have to provide information and facilities required to carry out the evaluation.

Both the wider evaluation committee and the Home Economics Staff viewed the outsider as the 'teacher', a 'leader' and 'doer'. Her role was viewed positively because it was considered that her presence would ensure that something was achieved, provide the opportunity for an unbiased account and possibly help to solve problems. Furthermore, she had worked with the school on a previous occasion and a number of staff knew her, and knew that projects she was involved with had positive results.

Despite this ready acceptance, the outsider felt she had to allow time to build up a good working relationship with the Home Economics teachers, and expected to play a low-key role in the project.

The evaluation was viewed as one way of identifying and solving problems. It was also anticipated that the skills gained from the project would enable other teachers in the school to undertake evaluations by themselves or with minimal outside assistance. The evaluation committee was perceived to have been formed primarily for this reason. Although open to all staff, the committee was composed of senior staff who joined out of curiosity or a desire to learn more about evaluation.

THE PROCESS

The evaluation process involved seven steps:

1. Identifying and making clear an issue;
2. Planning and structuring;
3. Collecting information;
4. Analysing the information;
5. Making judgements;
6. Deciding the action;
7. Making the desired changes.

When the project co-ordinator joined the project the first step had almost been completed by senior staff, who delineated the focus issue as:

> What is the option course and is it perceived as appropriate?

Before proceeding any further the co-ordinator, in conjunction with the evaluation committee, outlined a plan of action. This included the establishment and clarification of a set of principles covering the following aspects:

- ownership of information collected;
- the audience for particular reports for the Project;
- the rights and obligations of the outside co-ordinator;
- the commitment by the school to give teaching release time as required for the Home Economics staff.

The plan became a form of contract between the co-ordinator and the school.

Information was collected using a variety of techniques: classroom observation, focussed interviews, diaries, questionnaires and document analysis. Although the project co-ordinator was officially designated 'information collector', where appropriate she devised instruments in collaboration with the evaluation committee. She also involved three people from outside the school who assisted with specific tasks, namely student interviews and lesson observation.

The information collected was categorised by the co-ordinator, and used as the basis for a detailed interim report. This report was presented to the Home Economics staff for their consideration and reflection. The co-ordinator and staff discussed the implications of the findings of the investigation and some judgements were made regarding the effectiveness of the course. These were written as the conclusions to the final report.

What the People said ..... about the Process

The project co-ordinator noted that 'the outsider involved in an evaluation project can be invited by the school to take on any number of roles. The decision to use the outsider for this project as adviser, co-ordinator of tasks, contact between school and external resources, collector of information and the reactor or 'critical friend' during the stages of analysis and judgement, placed a lot of responsibility on one person.'

To overcome the problem of working alone she deliberately identified a number of assistants at the Curriculum Centre and Research Branch on whom she could call for additional help and resources. In particular, she worked with one person who became her 'critical friend', helping the self-reflection and ideas-consolidation processes.

For the purposes of this project, the evaluation committee's decision to give the project co-ordinator considerable responsibility seemed appropriate. Senior staff were keen to undertake a 'manageable' evaluation, and as the school had a number of priorities and time was at a premium there appeared to be no other way of approaching the project. Furthermore, the Home Economics teachers had no prior curriculum evaluation experience and so relied heavily on the co-ordinator's suggestions and strategies. This dependence did not disturb them because they acknowledged her expertise in the area, and had complete faith in her ability to carry out the task. She consulted them at all times and they were free to disagree with her ideas or make alternative suggestions.

Although viewed as a pilot study from which the rest of the school could gain knowledge, Steps 2 to 5[1] (planning & structuring, collecting information, analysing the information, and making judgements) primarily involved the Home Economics teachers. Other members of the evaluation committee saw themselves as a non-participatory body, a 'Greek academy', and tended to only be aware of the general procedures being followed.

The rest of the school knew very little about the project. Limited information was officially disseminated, the Home Economics teachers were geographically isolated, having their own staffroom, and they carried a full teaching load during the project. The Home Economics staff felt that others were unaware, both of the effort being put into the evaluation of the Grade 9 Home Economics option course, particularly by the project co-ordinator, and of the complex nature of the school-level evaluation process itself.

All participants acknowledged the crucial role of the co-ordinator in the process and were impressed by the manner in which it was organised and administered. They saw her as a mediator, able to talk to all parties, and who in an efficient manner gathered information and wrote reports, constantly cross-checking to ensure that a correct account was being presented.

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1. See p.11 for a complete outline of the process.

THE OUTCOMES

As the project had an evaluation and an inservice component it is useful to consider the outcomes from both perspectives:

1. Evaluation: The Project was completed in December, 1979. A number of recommendations were made to improve the Grade 9 Home Economics option course and, as guaranteed by the senior staff, all were implemented. Some, however, were only to be a temporary measure due to timetabling constraints and future reductions in staff numbers.

2. Inservice: By undertaking a 'pilot' evaluation some teachers were provided with experience which would be of benefit if the staff decided to undertake other evaluations. Only four teachers (Home Economics staff) were directly involved with the Project and a further five (the rest of the evaluation committee) were aware of the general procedures being implemented. The remaining teachers were generally unaware of the Project, although it was occasionally mentioned in the daily news-sheet and the project co-ordinator and members of the evaluation committee were available to provide further information. Two final reports were written. One detailed specific results and recommendations relating to Home Economics and was only intended for the Home Economics staff and evaluation committee. The other which detailed the general procedures followed and offered some reflections on the process, was intended for a wider audience. In April, however, this had not been widely circulated.

What the People said ..... about the Outcomes

The school-level evaluation project was viewed primarily as a learning experience - both for the teachers and the outsider.

Although the Home Economics staff gained some knowledge of the evaluation process, they considered that many of the techniques relied on commonsense and were already used by teachers in their day-to-day teaching. Thus, they considered that the process did not come up with anything new, particularly as they could have suggested the recommendations without going through the 'rigmarole of evaluation'. They did, however, acknowledge that it made them think more deeply and that it would have been impossible to undertake alone.

The Home Economics staff were impressed with the project co-ordinator, especially her supportive, friendly manner and the ordered, methodical way she collected and analysed information and reported findings. Her faith in and enthusiasm for the project made it a worthwhile activity for them. Furthermore, the fact that a formal evaluation had been undertaken with outside assistance legitimised their interpretation of events, thus giving them more power when making recommendations. Overall, however, they were dubious about the value of the evaluation process because a number of their recommendations were only implemented on a temporary basis. They clearly saw success in terms of the permanent implementation of these and this view coloured feelings they had about the process they had been through.

The other members of the evaluation committee were able to obtain a broader view of the project. They considered the project to be a worthwhile activity because it provided a number of people with information about evaluation, and the objectivity of the evaluation process ensured that a true account was given. In these terms they saw it as 'one of the best exercises a school could undertake to find out what was going on'. Like the Home Economics teachers, they found the procedures established by the co-ordinator to be particularly straight-forward and jargon-free. They suggested that these features made the procedures readily accessible for adaption by groups or individual teachers planning further evaluations in the school.

Few members of the general staff were aware of the project or talked about it, except to complain of extra lessons. Furthermore, there was some confusion about evaluation as a result of the school's one day activity. The three uninvolved teachers interviewed thought that most teachers would have been interested in the Home Economics evaluation, but might not have considered its focus relevant to their particular areas.

In terms of the original aims, the project co-ordinator considered that the project was successful for the following reasons:

1. the methods used did provide sufficient information for some differences and similarities in meaning to be identified;

2. the timetable developed for the Project was realistic;

3. the teachers of the course were given adequate time for reflection on the outcomes;

4. directions for change and development were apparent.

Whilst acknowledging that changes had occurred in the school, she found it impossible to ascertain if these were solely attributable to the evaluation Project. Personally, she found her involvement with the school to be an extremely positive experience and felt confident that the staff would call on the Curriculum Centre if further assistance was required. This view was reinforced by the teachers involved. Despite this, she would have liked details of the process to have been more widely disseminated within the School.

One teacher, who was on the evaluation committee, is already planning to evaluate a section of his department.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the information presented in the preceeding pages:

1. The outsider's role was crucial for the success of this project because she planned and carried out the evaluation with minimal staff assistance.

2. The outsider played a major role in the project because the Home Economics staff had no previous evaluation experience. It would appear that teachers must be committed and have some understanding of the evaluation process before they can make a major contribution.

3. The procedures presented by the outsider met the school's needs because they were straightforward and could be easily followed. Similarly the evaluation reports were readily available for any staff member because they were clearly written.

4. Although the outsider played a dominant role, at no time did the Home Economics staff feel threatened or manipulated.

5. The outsider was given complete support because:

   - she approached the project in a professional, methodical and low-key manner;
   - she attempted to give a true account;
   - she communicated and consulted constantly with staff;
   - she had enthusiasim for and faith in the project;
   - she was perceived to be a supportive, friendly and fair person.

6. The credibility of the project increased because an outsider was involved, thus potentially giving the teachers more power to implement recommendations.

7. Only those teachers involved in the project benefited from the outsider's skills because detailed information about the process was not disseminated to the rest of the school.

8. When the outsider has considerable responsibility in a project, is is useful if she too has an outsider or 'critical friend' with whom she can share ideas and discuss strategies.

These conclusions have implications for the school and the Curriculum Centre.

Implications ..... for the School

The evaluation carried out by the Home Economics staff, in collaboration with the project co-ordinator, was a positive experience for the people involved. It was unfortunate, however, that more members of staff were not aware of the types of activities being undertaken, if only to gain an overview of the evaluation process.

If a similar project is carried out again in the school it would be useful for senior staff to build in extensive strategies for the dissemination of information. This would serve a dual purpose; it would increase the number of people gaining evaluation skills, and support the core of people doing the work.

Furthermore, to overcome feelings of isolation it is important that teachers closely involved with any such project perceive that they are supported, particularly by the Principal and senior staff. To gain maximum benefit from the process they must also have a strong degree of commitment to it. Thus, time must be set aside for them to gain some understanding of the issues, processes and possible role, prior to undertaking the evaluation. They should also be closely involved in all stages of the process and feel that the area/issue identified for review is worthwhile.

In the initial planning stages it is also useful for staff to consider the possible outcomes of the evaluation, so that forward planning strategies may be initiated to implement recommendations.

Implications ..... for the Curriculum Centre

As there are limited financial and human resources available to help teachers undertaking school-level evaluations, it is essential that those which are available are used to best advantage. Thus, although the review of the role of the outsider at Warrane High School is context-specific it is useful to consider the information which it contains and which may be applicable to other contexts.

There are obvious benefits to be gained from using an outsider to help teachers carry out their first formal school-level evaluation. In particular, the outsider brings in a wide range of experience and expertise to contribute to planning and organization. Less obvious benefits include the fact that the outsider acts as a stimulus to challenge existing views and keep the project going, offers an objectivity which ensures that findings and recommendations are perceived as fair, and can gain an overview of the situation that an insider does not have.

There is however, a danger that staff may perceive the outsider as a 'threat'. It would appear that these feelings can be successfully overcome if the outsider displays certain characteristics. These include enthusiasm, warmth, fairness and supportiveness, manifested by a low-key, professional and open manner. It does, however, take time for relationships to develop and this fact must be taken into consideration when planning evaluations.

Although the exact nature of the outsider's role will vary, some generalizations can be made:

i) The outsider has certain responsibilities to the staff he/she is working with, insofar as it is up to him/her to assess the situation before agreeing to work with the school, thus ensuring that there is positive motivation and some degree of teacher commitment.

ii) There is a need for the outsider, in conjunction with staff, to clearly delineate roles prior to undertaking an evaluation. If not, there is a danger that staff may rely too heavily on the 'outside expert' and merely go through the motions of evaluation, without any real understanding.

iii) The 'guidelines' (procedural and written) which the outsider takes into a school must be straightforward, easily followed, and offer potential for modification or adaptation.

Ideally, the outsider will be looking to do himself/herself out of a job. Thus, although initially he/she may be involved in all stages of the evaluation, if the school refocusses and looks at another area or issue, a more limited advisory role may then be taken. Alternatively the outsider may be someone from within the school, for example an English teacher who takes the role of outsider for a Maths evaluation.

These are some general thoughts on the role of the outsider in school-level evaluation. There is a need for Curriculum Centre Staff to further consider the following questions:

(i) What type of person is best suited to take the role of outsider in school-level evaluation activities?

(ii) What general procedures can be devised to facilitate school-based curriculum evaluations?

(iii) What types of working principles can be established within the Centre to ensure that there is continuous feedback and sharing of ideas between 'outsiders'?